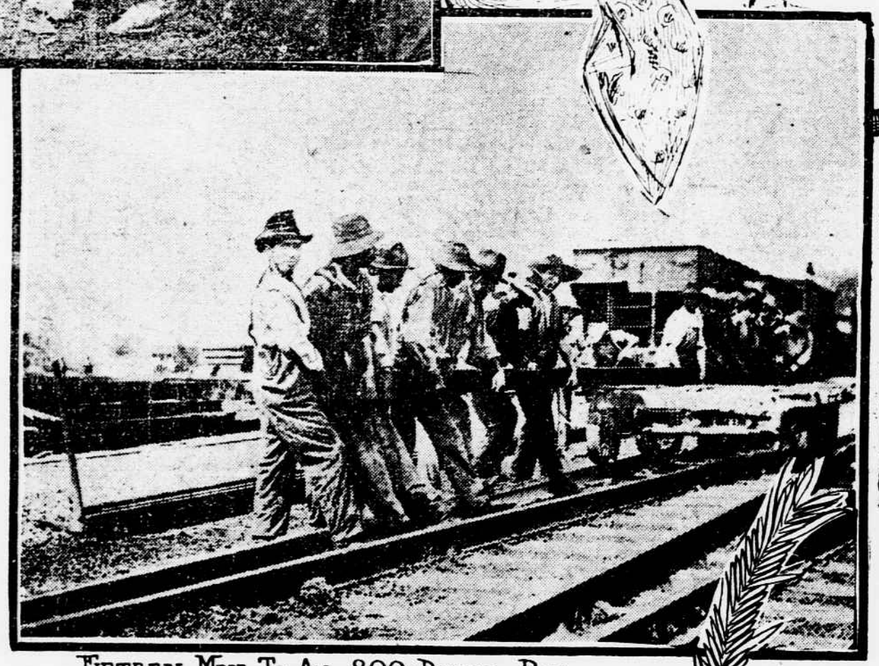
FAR FROM SUNNY "IT"

JACOPO

JUST BREAD *and no* ONIONS

THE NOON HOUR . . . BREAD *and* RAW ONIONS

"SOREFOOT" *in His* SUMMER HOME



FIFTEEN MEN TO AN 800 POUND RAIL

A JAMPLE BEFORE *the* GANG GETS HOME

JACOPO Castruccio of Avellino had visions. He was to be rich and grow many grapes. America, whence came the strange golden-haired men and women with the barbarous speech and much gold, for which they cared so little, would welcome him, call him little brother, give him work and send him back to cara Italia with pockets heavy.

For had not Pietro Gesterni of Atripalda just returned from five years in that far-off free land across from the bay of Naples, thirteen days of journey by the great boats? Had he not recited his adventures the night before over many sips of chianti in the Cafe Greco? What was it he said?

"Per Bacco, Jacopo, it is true, that which I am telling thee. It is a country of wonderful greatness, this America. Always there is work to do, for which they pay well. Food there is in plenty and of sufficient cheapness. In five years I have saved more than 2,000 scudi—in the coin of America, two thousand 'dollar.' I shall buy a cafe in la bella Napoli. Altro! Thou, too, shouldst leave la bella Maria and the bambino Giovanni. Fortune awaits thee across the seas."

Per San Gennaro! And why not? True, to leave Maria and fat little Giovannino, three years old only, would be a matter of many tears. But women's tears come always quickly and dry more quickly. What were tears, to stand in the way of the fortune across the seas? Nothing. That very day he should tell Maria.

Maria wept softly for three hours, then returned to her breadmaking, singing, and shedding recalcitrant tears into the dough. It was arranged that Donna Venna should take in the deserted ones, giving housing and food for much work in the little bake shop. Pietro, the traveler, was to accompany the exultant Jacopo to Naples and see him safely aboard the great boat. Jacopo talked much to all Avellino of his new fortune. It was all settled. He had but to cross the sea, stay two, three, four, maybe five years, and return laden with riches.

Parting with the loved ones came shortly at the railway station of Avellino. Maria held little Giovanni up to the third-class carriage window for a last paternal smack, accompanied by the inevitable "M-m-mm," seemingly ever a part of Latin osculation. Guards slammed the doors, a wheeze from the rheumatic engine and Avellino was left behind. Until a curve hid them from sight Jacopo ignored placard warnings and stretched from the window, waving a big yellow handkerchief. Maria stood swaying on the platform, wailing in desolation.

"Oh, lasso! Oh, poverina, che faro, Olme! Olme!"

* * *

Jacopo wept and smoked Pietro's Neapolitan cigars with straws through them all the way in silence to Salerno. A change of trains and Naples was entered late that night. Until dawn Jacopo and Pietro sat in Pietro's new little cafe and discussed Jacopo's future. Pietro had much advice.

"Remember, caro amico, what I have told thee of this abominable English tongue. It is necessary that thou shouldst make thyself understood somewhat to find thyself about. Shouldst thou wish to find a certain house or quarter have some forestiere (foreigner) to write it down for thee on paper. Then in seeking it thou canst address a carrabiniere, what in America they call 'plees-a-man.' Give him the paper and say to him what I have told thee. The plees-a-man thou canst easily find. On the joining place of the streets he stands ever, dressed richly in blue, with many gold buttons, and bearing a round stick, long, like so. Beware, caro amico, of this fearful stick. Anger not the plees-a-man. A blow on the head from the stick and not soon wilt thou awaken. It is one who knows that tells thee. Ebbene! What was it I told thee to ask? I would see if thou hast remembered."

"I give the plees-a-man the paper. I remove my hat. I say—Dio Caro, I forget—Ah! I say: 'Plis, meestaire pless-a-man, 'ow Ah getta dees a place.' Cospetto! I remember well, amico, do I not?"

"Evero. Dost remember what I told thee to say in seeking work?"

"Per Bacco, si: 'Plis, meestaire, giv' a me da job.'"

"And when thou dost not understand?"

"Ah! 'Non capisco, no spik Eengleesh.' Is it not wonderful, my remembrance?"

"Per San Gennaro, it is miraculous."

Then Pietro bethought him of an amusing jest. His was a sly wit.

"Ah! Jacopo, caro amico, it has just returned to me that I have neglected to tell thee how to express thy gratitude to the plees-a-man and others rendering thee assistance in America. Thou shouldst smile happily and from the heart say: 'Go'a ta hell.'"

"Per Bacco, it has a quarrelsome sound. Again, amico."

"Go'a ta hell."

"Ah! It comes to me. 'Go'a ta hell. Go'a ta hell.' I shall remember."

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At noon the next day Jacopo waved farewell to Pietro on the dock and saw la bella Napoli slip into the haze from threatening Vesuvian fires. He found himself one of hundreds of his countrymen, like himself, bound for America and fortune. It was pleasant, this mingling with happy, expectant brothers and sisters. It was pleasant that afternoon and night, but at breakfast the next day the ship was plowing into a westerly gale that was piling up the surface of the Mediterranean in heavy hillocks. At the table Jacopo felt a sudden dizziness.

"Dio Caro!" he cried, and, racked by nausea, fled from the saloon and sought his dark, stuffy bunk. Then days later he crawled to the deck, weak, emaciated and heart and home sick. There was nothing rosy about the future. He wished himself dead a thousand times.

The last three days of the passage were over sunlit, rippling seas. When they picked up the lightship at the Hook Jacopo had recovered much of his radiant optimism. Life was worth living after all. He could not sleep that night off quarantine for excitement.

The next morning he took his place in line with his fellow steerage passengers, and a fat little man in uniform poked him all over, made him stick out his tongue and did other curious and absurd things, while a fellow-Italian performed the office of interpreter. A little later and Jacopo, with his shiny, compressed paper gripsack and kerchief bundles hugged to his breast, was hustled down a gangway into a tug along with a horde of his fellow-passengers and ferried toward those huge, mountainous buildings against the sky, which some one told him were New York. What happened at Ellis Island Jacopo cannot to this day remember. He knows he was pulled and hauled around from place to place, asked millions of questions that he did not understand, and finally turned into the street with his precious bundles and a slip of paper on which was written the address of Andrea Costello, a great friend of Pietro's, and to whom the returned Neapolitan had told Jacopo to go for lodging and assistance.

It was so beautiful to be on the dear earth again. He was in no hurry. Why not walk? Instinct told him that his destination lay northward, and he was soon strolling up Broadway, laden with belongings, the object of casual amusement. It was hard walking. The sea had not left his legs and he found himself rolling a bit. He decided to seek Andrea Costello's place. Now for a "plees-a-man."

Surely, that must be one just ahead, twirling that round stick and gazing retrospectively into space. Jacopo hurried forward and touched the awesome figure on the sleeve. Patrolman McDonnegan left his castle in Spain and glanced down at the greasy little figure beside him.

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"Well, spaghetti, w'atchoo want?" he said affably.

Jacopo thought of his lessons in English.

"Plis, Meestaire Plees-a-man—Dio Caro, I forget. Plis, Meestaire Plees-a-man, giv'a me da job."

"A job? Skiddoo. I've got all I kin do to hold me own job widout providin' emergrant dagos."

Jacopo scented a mistake. Producing his slip of paper he gave it to the officer. Then he remembered.

"Per San Gennaro," he muttered. "It is my mistake."

He appealed again to Mr. McDonnegan.

"Plis, Meestaire Plees-a-man, 'ow Ah getta dees'a place?"

Years of service in lower New York had given McDonnegan a smattering of many tongues, and it was an easy matter for the big, good-natured bluecoat to explain, partly by gesture and counting on the fingers and partly by elementary English supplemented by a stray word or two of Italian, how Jacopo destination was to be gained by crosstown street car and leg exercise. Profusely grateful, Jacopo remembered Pietro's teachings, and thought to win further the good graces of this wonderful plees-a-man.

"Buono giorno, mio amico," he said, his fine Latin smile shining like a sunbeam, "go'a ta hell."

"Huh?" queried McDonnegan, taken by surprise.

Jacopo beamed.

"Go'a ta hell; go'a ta hell."

McDonnegan's paw clutched the astounded Italian by the collar.

"W'atchoo mean, you dirty little dago peanut, by talkin' like that to me? I've a mind to give ye' a ride in th' wagon."

Jacopo shook with fear in the grasp of the giant officer. What was wrong he knew not. He could but repeat "Go'a ta hell" in a vain attempt to express his gratitude and innocence of any wrong intent. Something in his manner made McDonnegan hesitate. Then it dawned on him that the "dago" was using the objectionable phrase with such deprecatory inflection and emphasis as to rob it of all insult, and the possibility of Pietro's joke came to him. He released his grip on Jacopo's collar.

"Skiddoo wid youse," he commanded.

"Go'a ta hell," said Jacopo, smiling, and he turned up the street, leaving McDonnegan to the enjoyment of the crude jest.

Several more appeals to passersby were necessary before Jacopo finally found the tenement in which the Costellos lived, and was welcomed to their bosoms amid a bedlam of jabbered Italian and the exudation of much garlic-laden breath. He told of his journey, his seasickness, the strange things that happened to him at Ellis Island and his encounter with the policeman. Andrea, who knew English well, laughed hugely at Pietro's whimsical jest and explained it to Jacopo, who laughed in turn.

"Per Bacco," he laughed, "I shall get even with amico Pietro when I return with my fortune. Is it not so, Andrea?"

* * *

All this happened two years ago. Last week I stood in the broiling sun between the rails of one of the new terminal tracks in the union station yards watching a gang of Italians labor under the throaty commands of an old Irish foreman. With me was a friend who really knew some Italian. I was after copy; he was to be my interpreter.

Noon came, and the gang threw down their tools and seated themselves along a row of empty freight cars. They produced their luncheon. For the majority it was a half-loaf of heavy-looking brown bread, washed down by hydrant water. A few of the group peeled onions with their long-bladed clasp knives—tool and weapon combined—sliced them and made a huge sandwich of the half loaf. One unrolled from a bit of greasy paper a rasher of raw bacon. This he sliced and ate raw between thick pieces of bread.

There was one of the number whose bright smile of greeting attracted us. We spoke to him. My friend's Italian was productive of fervent ejaculations of pleasure. Seated on the ties at his side, my friend plied the young laborer with questions. That is how I learned the story of Jacopo's emigration to America. For this was Jacopo of the golden dreams. Two years he had labored in ditches, tunnels and excavations. He had been able to get no better work as yet. But he was hopeful. He had saved, oh, yes, $200. By winter he would enter into a fruit stand partnership with a friend in New York city. Yes, Maria was well, and the bambino, too. In three years he was surely going back and buy a fine vineyard.

"Dees'a no w'at you call'a da dope dream," he explained to me in English. Evidently he had gained much knowledge of the vernacular. "Sometime w'en Ah tell'a dess dey say 'Queet'a da smoke, queet'a da smoke, mak'a skeedoo.' Altro! Birbante! (Ruffians by profession.) San Gennaro! Ah mak'a da show. Amico Pepe an' me, we gone sell'a da peanutta an' da o-ranje. Byme-by Ah mak'a da skeedoo. Sure'a, meestaire. Ah put'a da mon' in da po-ket—so (expressive Latin gestures throughout this). Ah pack'a da trunk, tak'a da beeg'a sheep, say go'a ta h——, America—wa't you call?—twenty-seex for'a you. Den once'a more Ah see la pul bella Napoli—Maria—de bambino. Ah, meestaire——"

After a moment the sunny side of his Latin temperament again had the mastery.

"I spik'a Eengleese good'a now," he added. "No'a catch'a me wid da joke."

The labor? Oh, yes, it was hard, but what would you? It brings $1.50 a day and a place to sleep in. There is almost always a demand for gang labor on the railroads, city and steam.

A place to sleep! Behold above a picture of a typical "camp car," as the railroad men call these makeshift quarters made out of box cars. The Latin gentleman cutting a watermelon is one of Jacopo's friends, a Sicilian. Sorefoot is the name given him on the railroad.

One day two summers ago he suddenly threw down his crowbar and walked away.

"Hey, w'ere in —— are you goin'," yelled the foreman.

"Ah work'a no more'a dees'a day," said Giuseppe.

"An' why not?"

"By dam, ma feet. One bad'a feet, all'a right. Work'a jus' same. Two bad'a feets, no good. By dam, dat's all."

And Giuseppe laid off for a week until his "feets" were able to stand the gaff. Hence the sobriquet.

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Jacopo and his countrymen laboring out at Eckington in the railroad yards are members of a vast army of Italians employed in similar work throughout the country. They are valued by the railroad companies not because of their strength, which is slight, but because of faithfulness to their tasks and economical and, hence, steady habits.

From all over Italy they come; many because of golden dreams like Jacopo's, others to evade conscription to the army, still others because of the interest taken in their whereabouts in certain official quarters. They all expect to reap a fortune in two or three years. Many of them succeed, but not in that short while. In Italy back somewhere in the hills of Tuscany, I believe, there is a thriving town whose inhabitants are nearly all ex-residents of the United States—Italians that came here to make their fortune and had more or less success.

While here they give little trouble. In congested quarters in big cities there is violence—vendettas, with stiletto obligatos—but it is always between Italians; they leave Americans alone. At work they plod faithfully, cheerfully giving the best they can. Sometimes this is not much.

There were fifteen of them lined up at Eckington to lift an 800-pound rail. The foreman gave them a disgusted glance. He had been working in southern territory, and was not used to "dago" labor.

"Look at thim dagos," he said to us, "two thousand of 'em to wan little 800-pound rail. Four naygurs could toss thot rail about like a billy-ard cue."

I gathered that negro labor has its advantages over Italian, because of superior physical strength and endurance. This seems to be due to diet. The average negro laborer gets plenty to eat. If not working himself he usually has some woman working for him. He wants meat, and always manages to get it. Pork chops and chicken do more for the muscles than bread, garlic and water.

Jacopo's social pleasures are few just now. In the evening after work a little something to eat is cooked in front of the camp car. Then, perhaps, he will change clothes, brush his hair, wipe his face on a rag and come into town. Usually this is only on Saturdays. Weekday nights are spent mostly in the camp car or about it. Perhaps a guitar is brought out, and songs of cara Italia and la bella Napoli sung by the best voiced of the laborers. Only those able to sing do so. The others prefer to listen and not queer the effect by inharmonious buttings-in. In this respect they have it on similar gatherings of Americans.

Jacopo lives amid so much dirt that he has grown a bit careless. Anything grimier and more greasily unclean than the interior of his summer home I have yet to investigate. But the artistic temperament transcends all things sordid. When I asked Giuseppe to pose for his photograph, he rushed to a cracked bit of mirror nailed to the car wall. He laid one hand on top of his head and with a dubious-looking comb encircled the forefinger with a ridge of sticky, stiff curls. Pressing them firmly with his other hand served the purpose of a curling iron. Then the forefinger was carefully extracted from the cylinder of curls, and behold the tonsorial marvel pictured above. The grime that blotched his face mattered not. It would not show in the picture. But per San Gennaro, let our hairs ever be in order.

But here's to you, Jacopo. May your dream of fortune be yours in fact. May three years see you wealthy and seasick, homeward bound to "Sunny It," la pul bella Maria and little Giovanni. Addio!

E. R. S.

The British Crown.

From the London Observer.

The crown is already of great weight—thirty-nine ounces and five pennyweights—no light burden for the king on the occasion when his majesty performs the ceremony of opening parliament. To add to it the Cullinan diamond would increase this weight by about three-quarters of a pound avoirdupois, which, it is estimated, is what the jewel would weigh after it was cut. The crown, as it is seen today in the Tower of London, contains 2,818 diamonds, 297 pearls and many other exquisite jewels. Its chief gem is the ruby, the value of which has been estimated at £100,000, which was given to the Black Prince in Spain in the year 1367, and was worn by Henry V in his helmet at the battle of Agincourt.